

Oral History Interview with
 Ethel McCay Dubeault
 Feb. 28, 1998
 by Evelyn McClure & Laurie Horn

(Ethel reads a prepared statement)

I, Ethel McCay Dubeault have lived in the same place in Sebastopol since 1910. We came from Nebraska and my dad went out and plowed for people while mother stayed home and received the chickens that people would bring in to sale. Sometimes Miller's Dray would come down and get the chickens. They were shipped to Petaluma and then they would go on the Steamer of Gold to San Francisco. On Saturday Mother and I would take the electric car, that was right here in front to Petaluma then get on the train to Sausalito from there go to the ferry bldg. in San Francisco. We would go to San Francisco to collect for the chickens we had sent to the City the week before. I started grammar school in Sebastopol on Bodega Avenue. Then to Gold Ridge on Bloomfield Rd. graduated from there and graduated in 1926 from high school with Willard Libby (Sebastopol native who won the Nobel Prize in Physics for carbon dating). Went to school and grammar school with Martha McLeod Helwig, Helen and Lucille Cunningham, Dorothy Sparkes, two other good friends were Hazel Moore Wells and Clara Snow Shone. Went to college and met Henry Dubeault who I married in 1930. Henry came down to help my dad buy chickens. By then we were the largest poultry dealers in Northern California. All the little ranchers around had 4 to 5,000 chickens to get their families through school. We delivered 45,000 chickens a day to San Francisco by truck. We bought from Dave Weiss, Luther Weiss, Charlie Donnelly, Martin Peterson, Donald Zimpher, Japans (sp?) the Peterson's on Peterson Road, Bob Garlock and many others. Quit in 1967 when Henry's health broke down. That is what I wrote.

E: Your parent's settled here from somewhere else?

ED: From Nebraska.

E: What year did they come to Sonoma County?

ED: 1907.

E: Were they born in Nebraska?

ED: Yes, and I was born in Nebraska.

E: What were your parent's names?

ED: Amy and Walter McCay. My mother's folks were all out here. Oh there were so many, Harry Davis, he was a retired banker. My grandfather.

E: When did your grandparents come out here?

ED: I think in 1906 or 07.

L: Did they live here?

ED: No they lived in Santa Rosa. They settled on Washington St. Then they moved out to Sebastopol Road. My grandfather came because his folks, he had two sisters here. They all had such big families. Then we moved up back of the grammar school in Sebastopol and then my dad bought this property. We came here in 1910.

E: And you had all your chicken operations right out of here?

ED: We bought and sold poultry and went to SF everyday with chickens.

E: Were they live chickens?

ED: They were live. They were all processed down there. That man that you saw in the picture, c.1930 that was where they were processed in SF. The California Poultry Co.

L: You didn't keep the chickens here overnight ?

ED: Not as a rule.

L: Did you raise chickens yourself?

ED: No

E: In the early days were there trucks to transport the chickens?

ED: Mostly when we were in it, just real small, we'd take them to Sebastopol and they'd be shipped to Petaluma and then on the Steamer Gold.

E: They went on the electric train? That went by your property?

ED: Miller's Dray (Clarence and later Rodney Miller) when there were big loads sometimes they would come out.

E: They had trucks?

ED: Yes.

E: Tell me about your childhood. 1910. you were how old when you settled here?

ED: I'm almost 91 now. I was 3 when we settled here. In this same old house.

E: Do you have brothers and sisters?

ED: No I don't, I'm an only child.

E: What did your father do before, in Nebraska?

ED: I guess he was a farmer

E: How did he get into the chicken business here?

ED: I guess mother and dad were always trying to figure out how to make some money. Especially my mother was great on that. They had a hard time when they first came here.

E: When you went to school, at Analay High School?

ED: At Analay and I graduated with Willard Libby.

E: Do you remember Willard Libby, can you tell me something about him?

ED: Yes, he was a real good student, a very nice person. I had him. And he always knew the answers to everything.

L: He was kind of quiet wasn't he?

ED: Very quiet and a very fine person.

E: Do you remember any little stories about him from High School?

ED: Oh I wouldn't want to put that down but he went around with Clare Shone. She's gone now. He went to Southern California. My dad and his dad were friends. I think he ran an apple orchard. But I couldn't tell you too much. I took a college course and Willard Libby took a college course and I was in quite a few of his classes at Analay.

L: In those days when you went to school you had to decide if you wanted to take a college prep course, business course or homemaking I guess they called it. Everyone had to take cooking and sewing.

(discussion of school days)

L: Willard Libby had twin sisters, they went to school with me, Evelyn and Ona I think it was.

L: Are they still around?

ED: The woman at the dry cleaners told me one time that she was related to Willard Libby.

L: Which one? ED: The one by Fiesta.

L: Oh there must be something written up about him?

E: Yes, recently I looked up information on him and there were writings on his scientific work.

L: He had a brother, that lived near us on Walker Ave. was married and had two children about the ages of mine and when the polio scare came I think their little boy got polio, not too bad.

E: College, you went on to college?

ED: I went to Humboldt State.

E: What did you study?

ED: For a teacher

E: Did you teach afterwards?

ED: Not very much. Our business grew and I just helped here with the work. So much work to do.

E: With your parents or had you gotten married by that time?

ED: I got married right after (college) and the folks and Henry built the house next door.

L: Did you live in this one or that one?

ED: I lived in that one first and when mother got sick we moved over here. Henry and I raised two girls, his sister's children. One girl lives in Sacramento and one in South Carolina. And I went back there last spring and stayed 3 weeks. She came out and got me.

E: They decided to settle there rather than in California?

ED: Oh I was so sorry when they did. I have so much to take care of here. His folks were from there, his dad. They live in a little town twice the size of Forestville. They have a restaurant, he's a mason and shiner. She's real happy there.

E: Besides work what did you find interesting to do with your life?

ED: Oh we always went on trips. Sometimes little trips. Till after we retired. But we'd go weekends on trips.

L: You were an active lodge member weren't you?

ED: I belonged to the Rebekahs a little bit. I belonged to the Republican women.

E: Let's go back away and talk about your parents. Can you tell me what kind of people they were and what they were interested in ?

ED: They liked to go on trips. On weekends we'd go on trips. I think my folks were always in business. They were workers. When other people were out playing, they were working.

E: Did you have to do the chicken hauling every day of the week?

ED: No just five days.

E: Did all the farmers bring chickens here or did you have to pick them up?

ED: We did both ways.

E: What happened to all the eggs?

ED: Garlocks in Sebastopol bought eggs. There were quite a few.

L: Did you take fryers or old hens?

ED: We took both. There was more weight to the old hens, we liked those better, we got more money.

L: People would raise chickens from a hatchery and they got to be fryers size and they'd sell them before they laid eggs. If you had laying hens you have them awhile until they don't produce then you get rid of them. So that's your fricassee chicken and roasting hens.

ED: Oh my dad did belong to the Odd Fellows, I forget that.

L: Did you belong to Eastern Star? PTA?

ED: I don't think I did. When the girls came here I was so busy I didn't know how to manage things.

L: How old were they when they came?

ED: One was five and one was 12.

L: That must have been a change in your life?

ED: I should say it was. I was busy working with chickens and I took care of an aunt here and my mother and dad. So I was real busy. I didn't have much time. But I really had a nice life, an interesting life.

L: And you've been healthy?

ED: Oh yes.

L: That's from your hard work.

(pause)

ED: They were up on Petaluma Avenue here, Garlocks, they had eggs and poultry.

L: Petaluma was the egg basket for the world, but they also sold chickens too.

ED: Yes.

E: Sounds like Sebastopol was almost as big, I keep reading about chicken raisers here.

L: Look at all the chicken houses all over especially towards the coast. Two Rock and Valley Ford, lots of them there. Did you ever raise any other animals?

ED: No not really.

E: How many acres do you have here?

ED: Four.

L: How long has the little store and hamburger place been there ? (Sequoia Drive In on Gravenstein Hy South (which is next door to Ethel's home)

ED: Oh its been such a long time. I don't know.

E: You were talking about riding the electric train with you and your mother, Did you do it (ride) a lot?

ED: Oh yes and I went to high school on the electric car. It stopped down here on Garvey/Garber (?) Drive.

L: Was that Bassett Station? By the cold storage plant.

E: That was Bassett Station?

ED: Across from the Japanese Church. Bixby Shaw Station going into town and that was there by the beauty parlor on Petaluma Ave. I can't tell you if this was 14 or 18 here.

E: The stations had a number? Instead of a name?

ED: Yes

L: That's something I tried to get started to a list of names of people who rode on the trains/streetcar to school. I thought that would make an interesting part of the train exhibit (which opened the Museum in 1993)

E: Did you ride the train into Santa Rosa?

ED: Yes and to Petaluma and to the boat, that's how we collected our money for chickens from Spreckels markets. At 6 o'clock we'd take the electric car then go on the train (Northwestern Pacific to Sausalito) and to the Ferry bldg. (in SF) and a streetcar up to the market (in SF).

E: How long did that take?

ED: Oh it didn't take too long. We'd get up and leave at 6 am.

L: Have lunch in SF?

ED: Oh yes we'd have lunch. When things were more prosperous we'd go up to Union Square.

L: It probably took 2 hours.

ED: Probably.

L: With good connections on the train and ferry.

ED: During the World's Fair, both of them, we'd go down and collect and take the streetcar in 1914 and go out to the fair.

E: What are you memories of the 1915 fair?

ED: Oh I remember it was all sand dunes. Almost every week we'd go out to the fair. I think I gave Hazel my crown of jewels from the Fair.

E: And you went to the Treasure Island Fair in 1939?

ED: Oh yes.

E: How did you get to that Fair?

ED: I guess we went by car.

E: Could you drive onto Treasure Island?

ED: We went to San Francisco and ... My dad always drove an old Ford and he'd go to Clare (Snow) Shone's dad by Pellini and buy a Ford once in awhile.

E: Do you remember grade school years, your teachers and what it was like?

ED: I started with Hazel Moore going to the grammar school on Bodega Ave. Then they built a new school on Bloomfield Road (that's made into a house now) on the left hand side. I went to school with Dorothy Sparkes (Sparkes Road) and the Cunningham girls (Cunningham Station) and Martha McLeod Helwig that has, built the hospital (Palm Drive)

L: Her father was a jeweler wasn't he? McLeod

ED: No he had a little chicken ranch. I always ride down to the nursery, kind of in back. She was an adopted girl. They had a chicken ranch. Martha worked so hard on that ranch.

E: You went to the school that is now someone's home?

ED: It's at Snow Road, its made into

L: Is it on the corner of Snow and Bloomfield?

ED: If you go across Snow Road you go almost into the house.

L: Snow road is between Sparkes/Bloomfield. That was Gold Ridge School. What a funny name for that school. Gold Ridge is out here. They must have changed the name or something. What is the one on Bloomfield called now?

(school name discussion)

E: We didn't talk about how you met your husband?

ED: I was going to college.

E: You met him at Humboldt State. Where is the college.

ED: Close to Eureka.

E: What was he studying?

ED: He had a garage up there.

E: Oh he wasn't a student

ED: No, his family was there. Then he came here and joined my family in the chicken business.

E: What is your family ancestry, McCay, Scottish?

ED: My dad's side were from Illinois, Champaign. My mother's, my grandfather's name was Van Horn. It was changed to Davis. Mother always said she was German. I don't know if she was.

E: Was it changed when they immigrated?

ED: I don't know

L: Sometimes people are proud of being a German or maybe they are not proud. So then they change. My mother's sister married a man and his name was Kaiser. When the War came along they were angry at him and they were Americans, their parents were from Germany, so they changed it right away to Kay.

ED: Mother was always so proud of the Germans, she said it always took the Germans to do things. Mother stuck up for them.

L: I bet your mother was a good cook?

ED: Oh my mother always cooked meat, potatoes and gravy. She didn't bother too much with housework. She was always busy trying to make money or hoeing weeds.

L: I think the German women did more things than a lot of the other nationalities. They did a lot of fancy work, lace and things. They kept busy all the time.

E: We were talking about your father plowing, he did this for other people?

ED: That was right at first. He was trying to get ahead.

(discussion of farm activities in early days - sharing of equipment, labor)

end of tape.